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Forestry and Democracy

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TO MANY foresters the rate at which conservative forestry practices are being adopted by private forest landowners must seem slow indeed. It is a slowness resulting from one of the false concepts of the fundamentals of a democracy; namely, that a landowner, because he owns land, *per se*, may insist on the right to do with it as he sees fit even if such actions may in the long run be detrimental to the welfare of his neighbors and himself. In view of the past application of this principle, many of you have had reason to doubt the probability of accomplishing results adequate to insure the security of the forest resource through slow and ponderous democratic procedures which are based upon education and voluntary cooperation. Cooperation, however, has a fundamental and very necessary place in the development and success of a democracy. It implies that those who are affected, either beneficially or otherwise, shall work together for the greatest good of all. In forestry, cooperation should be (I do not say *is*) all of this: national, state, local, and private agencies and landowners cooperating for the common good on a common front which will advance the objectives of all, through channels of procedure which are mutually agreeable. Ordinarily, there is little difference of opinion concerning the goal to be reached. Difficulties usually arise as to the methods to be used in achieving that goal. Whether the goal of sustained-yield forestry in this country may be reached without stringent regulation has not yet been determined. That this goal has not yet been reached by cooperation cannot be open to serious question, although some progress is being made.

The problem which presents itself is: Can the future of our forests, the employment of dependent population, the indirect benefits to stream flow, flood control, water and soil conservation, recreation and aesthetic values, all be properly safeguarded through typically American procedures without re-

¹ The thoughts presented in this paper are the personal opinions of the author.

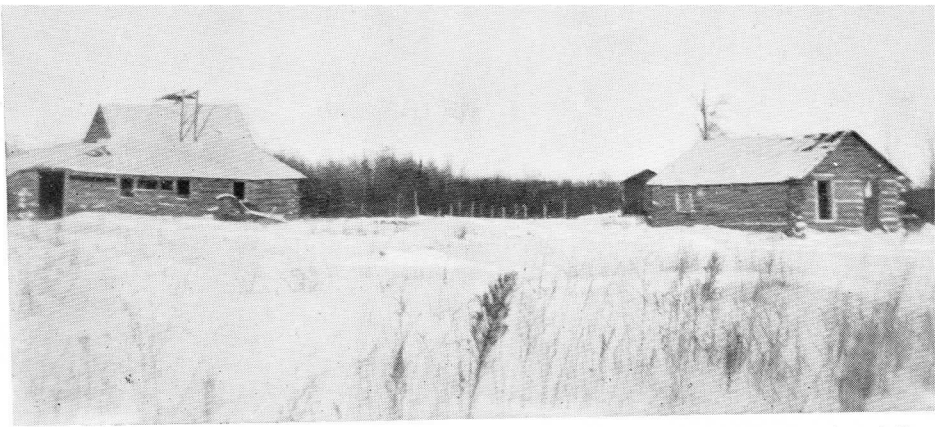
sort to compulsory, totalitarian measures? In other words, is democracy in forestry possible?

THAT we need to conserve our forests and other natural resources if we are to maintain our independent state is axiomatic. No nation may remain great and independent after its resources, both human and natural, have become exhausted. It is then easy prey for aggressor nations. In order to foster a balanced economy, the elimination of wastage and extravagant recklessness in the development of our resources must be accomplished if we are to continue long as a self-sufficient, independent major power. Forests are no less important to national well-being than are other natural resources. One has but to note the use of wood in national defense across the seas to realize the tremendous value which these nations place upon their forest resources. Cellulose and lignin are the building blocks for numerous compounds and substances which are now being lavishly used for clothing, shelter, explosives, and even for food.

It has long been recognized that a nation supplying its own needs in forest products must maintain a minimum of 25 percent of its gross area in well-stocked, productive forests. In this country we now have approximately 495 million acres of commercial forest lands, making up 26 percent of the gross area of the nation. It is probable that this acreage will not be greatly reduced; and, thus, from the standpoint of acreages it might be said that we have adequate forests in the United States.

However, as most foresters well know, forest depletion is still occurring over broad areas, and the crux of the problem apparently is that of obtaining adequate management practices on private forest lands. Over 54 percent of the commercial forest lands are now in private ownership. This area includes the most productive sites which should be growing the larger share of timber. Yet, of the 83 million acres estimated as non-restocking, 75 million are on private lands—89 percent of the non-restocking area. The situation is caused by factors which are already sufficiently clear and need no further explanation. The important problem is to analyze the situation thoroughly and find a solution within the American pattern.

IT IS today recognized that the poor condition of forest land is not the sole fault of the landowner. Our early land laws were developed with little thought of their long-time effect



American Forests, magazine of The American Forestry Association

Unproductive, isolated holdings on cut-over wilderness where the inhabitants are getting by on dire thrift.

upon land use. During the past century and a half, Congress has donated over 200 million acres of the public domain to the states, over 94 million acres to the railroads to enable them to raise funds for their development, and has given or sold vast areas of mineral, forest, and farm lands to private owners; until nine-tenths of the original public domain has been disposed of. Little thought was given to the conservation of the resources at the time, because of the enthusiasm for encouraging settlement and development, and stimulating the industrial conversion of these resources. To a considerable extent the past destructive exploitation of forest resources had its roots in these early policies. It was not until a few determined individuals bent their efforts to revise these laws that the process was slowed down even to a small degree. This small group, seeking to set aside certain areas of public timber land for the use of future generations, succeeded in inserting in the General Revision Act of 1891 the forest reserve rider. Thus, the beginning of conservation resulted from the action of a small group and was actually passed contrary to the wishes of Congress during the last confused moments of a Congressional session. The desirability of this farsighted policy is now generally accepted, but certainly it cannot be said that it was the result of democratic processes. Rather, it was the opposite, and might as easily have been detrimental, instead of beneficial.

AFTER that, it took twenty years of education and the establishment of a federal forest service to reverse the original policy of Congress by having it recognize the need for public ownership and management of certain forest areas. Acceptance

of the fact that the public and the Federal and State Governments could not do the whole job seemed to be lacking in these early days. The Weeks Law of 1911 and the Clarke-McNary Act of 1924 are the outstanding mileposts in the progress of getting forestry adopted on private lands. Even these acts, as well as the original one, indicate the close relationship between the usefulness of forests for timber production and their value for the protection of watersheds. In recognition of these national forest benefits, later acts provided for a certain degree of public cooperation. Thus, we have gone through three periods of forestry development which are clearly defined, yet overlap one another; namely, private exploitation, public acquisition, and public cooperation and assistance.

The present situation with respect to national policy is a combination of all three—a Topsy-like development of policy which seems to be so typical in a democracy, which is satisfied with gradual progress and a gradual development of policy. The American assumption that private initiative through self-interest would keep our forest lands productive is being replaced by the thought that the general public should be in part responsible for those functions of the forest which benefit them. This gradual change over several decades has caused situations which are most unfortunate, resulting in divided responsibility, variations in policy according to regional dictates of immediate concern, and at the same time did not provide adequate public education and participation in the national and state programs so far proposed.

For instance, there probably are few individuals, including foresters, who understand the functions and responsibilities of the twelve federal agencies and almost forty state agencies administering forest lands and the forest policy of the United States. Today, we have a complicated and, in many respects, uncoordinated organization dealing with forestry problems. This, of course, does indicate progress by the fact that so many agencies are interested; but the overlapping of functions and duplication of responsibilities prove the need for a general overhauling of the forestry machine before it becomes completely stalled by sectional and agency jealousy and competition, duplication of effort, and resulting dilatory tactics.

IT SEEMS evident that if forestry development on private lands is to have public assistance, a smooth-running machine must be provided which will furnish this cooperation in pro-

portion to the national benefits which the forests provide. This calls for an effective organization with complete responsibility and centralized control, so operated that the local, affected population, industries, and landowners have a voice and interest in the administration of local problems. The national aspects of the forestry problem are too vital to the nation to allow the continuation of forest depletion because of the lack of a streamlined organization to cope with the problem. Such an organization might operate under one or a combination of the three avenues of approach which have been followed in the past.

The first and oldest is public ownership, which involves a highly centralized administration and minimum participation of the local population. This approach has been highly successful in certain countries, but unless carefully administered may become undemocratic, and perhaps should be used only to the extent necessary to handle problem areas which are beyond the scope of private enterprise because of such factors as low productivity, or because the general welfare in these areas would greatly outweigh the benefits to the individual. Most foresters agree that public ownership has a place in our forest policy and that it must be expanded; but it is also generally recognized that it cannot solve the major private-land forestry problem, because it tends to divorce local interest in administration rather than encourage it.

THIS method of approach is best exemplified by the national forests and various state and community forests, all of which have accomplished significant results. Perhaps too much time and effort have in the past been expended in obtaining additional public ownership, and too little leadership has been devoted to solving the important private land problems. An expansion of cooperation to private landowners should have a very desirable influence and could go far in strengthening the leadership of the United States Forest Service if the subject were reduced to terms which make possible the more active participation of the forest operators. This has been done in the case of fire protection, where much progress has already been made; and the recent hearings of the Joint Congressional Investigating Committee indicate conclusively that expanded activities in this direction are in popular demand. The same demand can, and should, be created for assisting in other phases of forest conservation. Is it possible that these excellent

beginnings in fire control are due to the fact that local participation has been made possible?

The second approach to the problem would be through the passage of laws providing for a reasonable degree of regulation and public control of operations on private forest lands. Although this is an accepted method in many countries, it has not yet applied to forests in the United States, except the abortive effort of the National Industrial Recovery Act. Although such regulation has questionable constitutionality, it does afford a means of accomplishing the desired objectives and fully recognizes the public aspects of the problem. However, it has been found, as in the case of the Volstead Act, that compulsion is usually an unsatisfactory procedure, and methods are generally found by means of which the intent of the law can be evaded. The task of administering such acts is one of almost unsurmountable difficulty. Although it is believed that the future will see more, rather than less, regulation of forestry activities, the demand therefor must come from the people themselves after a thorough campaign of education which would prepare them to assume the desired responsibility and see that such regulations are wholeheartedly accepted and efficiently administered.

The third avenue of approach would be by continuing and expanding cooperative efforts already begun, and which to a considerable degree have proved successful in their limited fields. Such cooperation might well recognize the necessity for providing subsidies from general funds equivalent to the public benefits received. It is believed that too little thought has been given to this matter by forest economists. Although the national income in 1929 was enhanced by three billion dollars through direct benefits from forest resources and industries, no estimates have as yet been prepared indicating what the indirect public benefits from forestry activities may be. One estimate has been made that of the five-billion-dollar recreation industry about a billion might be attributed to the forest resource. In like manner, what is the value of maintaining adequate forest cover from the standpoint of flood control, water conservation, soil-erosion control, navigation, and national defense? If these values exceed the three-billion-dollar estimate above, it seems patent that the Federal Government might well contribute to the extent of fifty percent or more in forestry activities on private lands. Perhaps a greater justification can be made. In any event, if we accept the principle



American Forests, magazine of The American Forestry Association

Better land and home sites have been provided through a land exchange plan carried out by the Forest Service and local communities. Abandoned land has been returned to forests.

that the Federal Government might well contribute in proportion to the public benefits received, that proportion should be worked out and the necessary enabling legislation presented for consideration. A rough estimate of the amount that might be justifiably expended in such a program would be somewhere in the neighborhood of eighty million to one-hundred million dollars a year.

IF SUCH cooperation could be developed, the Federal Government of necessity would need to take a guiding hand in the development of the necessary policy and administration. Such regulatory authority could probably be well justified in that forest products in large quantities are shipped in interstate commerce; floods and forest fires are no respectors of state lines; unemployment resulting from exploitive efforts in one area affect every one when it comes to paying relief costs; a forest in Tennessee may be used for recreational purposes by people from many states; soil eroded from one farm or state may have serious effects upon another. Thus, forestry is a national problem even on private lands and should be subject to certain public controls. This fact will in the future be reflected in regulatory statutes which will be proposed and guided by an enlightened public.

The tendency of legislation emanating from Washington during recent years has been in the direction of granting more and more responsibility to the Federal Government in matters dealing with the general welfare. The concentration of such

authority in the conservation field need not be alarming to the forester. In fact, it has many advantages and few disadvantages, provided the administration of this authority is so decentralized that local participation becomes a matter of routine. Although there is no legal power at present which would enable the people to compel private timber landowners to practice conservative forestry, the same results can be accomplished if such practices are made attractive enough through cooperation and assistance from the Federal Government in recognition of the public benefits received. The struggle ahead is one of gaining adequate national recognition for the general benefits at stake so that adequate legislation and finances are made possible. Foresters as a group, and forestry as a profession, do not yet have the complete confidence of the people, possibly because of the many schemes for compulsory regulation which have been proposed, and the lack of agreement among themselves.

THUS, some method of gaining that confidence must be proposed which is also sound and recognizes that the guiding hand of the Federal Government is necessary. It is believed that such a policy must recognize that the application of forestry policies and statutes resolves itself to a local matter in its administration, that the forest owner must in the end be relied upon to carry out these needed policies. Thus, decentralization of administration in the use of such cooperative funds is vitally important to the success of any national forestry program. The most logical agencies for the Federal Government to work through are the state foresters and state agricultural extension services, which have close contact with individual forest landowners.

The method by means of which the necessary funds can be secured should be subjected to very critical analysis and study. Just raising the needed cash is not sufficient if other objectives can be met at the same time. Thus, a tax applied for this purpose could have great educational value if it is direct enough so that the individual knows he is contributing to something worthwhile. It would make the user of forest products conscious of his dependence upon the forest and instill in him a desire to participate in a program of restoration, thus arousing his interest in an important national problem. Perhaps a tax on forest products in the form of a retail stamp tax might be considered. We buy migratory waterfowl stamps to con-

serve our ducks and geese, tax shotgun shells and other sporting equipment to conserve game, and usually the taxpayer is glad to make this contribution. It may be that such participation by the public is just the stimulus needed to encourage increased interest in conservation problems.

TO SUM up, it is suggested that it is the responsibility of the Federal Government, as representative of all of the people, to cooperate financially with local agencies to the extent of the national interest in the local forestry problem; that the Federal Government retain and establish additional regulatory functions in the basis of which such cooperation may be obtained; that the administration of such program be through the local agencies, providing for the fullest cooperation of local groups through forest conservation committees functioning in cooperation with their state forestry organizations. With adequate funds, centralized authority, decentralized administration, and local participation, it is believed that a program of forest restoration on private lands could be developed in complete harmony with the principles of democracy.



Far away on some lonely hill,
Snow covered evergreens, lovely still,
Above them sweeps the star filled sky
Peace, peace, and no man nigh.

—Mrs. Winthrop B. Lane

